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Published for the Bexley Christadelphian Ecclesia by



Light Bible Publications,

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VOLUME THIRTEEN

NUMBER 5

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1993

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One Bible — One God

EVERYBODY HAS HEARD of the Bible. Many people own one, perhaps an old family Bible. Some people know some of the stories in the Bible, but only a very few actually read it themselves.

The Bible outsells every other publication. Worldwide 250 million copies are distributed each year and it has been translated into 2,000 languages. What is so special about this Book?

The first fact to remember is that it is not one book but 66 separate books written by the pens of about 40 different people.

The second is, that these writers did not sit down and write at the same time, but over a period of some 1,600 years.

A third remarkable fact is that this library of books has survived at all. Why haven't the ravages of history destroyed these ancient writings from our heritage? Not only has it survived unchanged in content for millenia, but attempts to suppress or destroy its influence in peoples' lives in the past has only served to spread its message further across the world.

What is the message of the Bible? Is it still relevant in the 1990's? How can such an ancient book possibly have anything to say which could be of any use today?

It is the purpose of this article to put before you some answers to these questions. We want to give you the grounds on which a real living faith can be based. Faith does not have to be blind. It can be based on sound and logical reasons. For if faith is soundly based it will be a great motivator for good, and can lead a person to seek the Truth the Bible claims to give.

INSPIRED

Let us first look at the claims of the Bible — to be none other than the Word of the Almighty God and Creator of the universe.

'Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.'¹

¹2 Peter 1.20,21

'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.'²

These are statements which are fundamental to any study of the Bible and, if true, must have far reaching consequences.

The prophet Jeremiah claimed that he was irresistably borne along in delivering God's message even though he tried to suppress it.

He said:

'... But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing.'³

The writers were of vastly differing backgrounds and from many different geographical locations. The writers include kings, herdsmen, lawyers, courtiers, princes and fishermen, a tax collector and a tentmaker. There were about 40 different writers in countries such as Israel, Italy, Egypt and Babylon. 1,500 BC to 100 AD is possibly a difficult timespan to grasp. That was the approximate period of compilation of the Bible. It is equivalent to a period from the end of the Roman Empire to the present day. The following chart gives a brief outline of the structure and age of the Bible.

OLD TESTAMENT		
Approx 1,500 BC	5 Books of Moses	Genesis-Deuteronomy (History, Law, Family records, Jewish History)
	History Books	Joshua-Esther (record of God's dealings with the Jews)
Approx 1,000 BC	Poetic Books	Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon. (Written in Hebrew poetic form)
Approx 700-550 BC	Prophetic Books	Isaiah, Jeremiah etc to Malachi, (History, warnings & prophecy of future)
NEW TESTAMENT		
30-70 AD	4 Gospel records	4 separate accounts of life of Jesus
	Acts of the Apostles	After resurrection of Jesus
	Letters to 1st century Christian churches	
100 AD	Final message given in symbol by Jesus Christ	Revelation Apocalyptic writings/prophecy

²Timothy 3.16,17 ³Jeremiah 20.9

HARMONY

Naturally speaking, given the diverse backgrounds and cultures of its contributors, any collection of writings would almost certainly contradict each other and present radically different views of the subject, especially in the controversial field of religion; present totally opposed doctrines on subjects such as life after death, the creation and the nature of God and his purpose.

But, when we read impartially through their writings we do not find muddle, confusion and contradiction. What we do find is a distinct and harmonious theme which runs right through this library of books. That theme is God's purpose with the earth and man, centred in his son the Lord Jesus Christ. It is traced in different ways; by allegory, sign, prophecy, history. It is woven into hymns, prayers, historical accounts, letters. Often men will have acted out their lives as a type to be acted out again hundreds of years later. One example is the life of Joseph. In his life he foreshadowed in many ways the life of Jesus Christ, but it is impossible that Joseph could have known this or had any control over the events in his life.

CONSISTENCY

The consistent theme of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is the purpose of God in calling out of the world a people for his name — Yahweh Elohim, a people ultimately to live with Jesus Christ, their Saviour, on a beautiful earth. This is what the Bible calls the kingdom of God.

Jesus prayed:

'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.'⁴

The Bible is also consistent in its doctrine concerning the nature of God, the Father; Jesus Christ, His Son, and his special power — the Holy Spirit. The Bible is consistent in clearly stating the mortality of man and the sin being the reason for his dying state. It is consistent in maintaining only one way for a man to reverse his natural state, to become related to the Lord Jesus Christ through baptism after true belief and repentance. Peter, the apostle, states '*Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men; whereby, we must be saved.*'⁵ . . . That name is Jesus Christ.

STYLE

If we turn to the consistency in the style of the Bible, does this leave a flavour of mere human hand? Or does it speak of a divine author? Let us consider the following points:

1. Throughout, God the Creator is kept foremost. Human pride, human interest is always suppressed.
2. Sin — (disobedience to God) — constantly and consistently rebuked.
3. There is unsparing impartiality, eg when King David sinned in the matter of taking another's wife — all is recorded — not embellished, just the facts. Even

⁴Matthew 6.10 ⁵Acts 4.12

though he was called a man after God's own heart. There exists no prejudice, bias or misrepresentation.

4. Throughout there is a majesty and dignity not found in human writings.

INSEPARABLE LINKS

It can be further demonstrated that Old and New Testaments are inseparably linked, showing harmony in theme and subject matter. Faith must be in Old and New Testaments, for the New is rooted in the Old. Jesus underlines the divine authority which he regarded the Old Testament scriptures as having. He quotes from the books of Moses, the psalms and the prophets. Phrases like *'Did ye never read in the scripture.'*⁶ *'Ye do err not knowing the scriptures'*⁷ and *'All things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished.'*⁸

UNAMBIGUOUS PROPHECIES

This leads us on to another section of the evidence which can give us faith. It relates to ten Old Testament prophecies concerning the life of Jesus Christ, written hundreds of years before his birth. This is REAL PROOF of the inspiration of the Scriptures — God-breathed. These are clear and precise.

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES RELATING TO JESUS CHRIST

1. The time he should appear	Daniel 9 v 24
2. The place of his birth	Micah 5 v 2
3. Family descent and parentage	Genesis 12 II Samuel 7
4. His character	Deuteronomy 18 Psalm 45
5. The way the Jews would receive him	Isaiah 8
6. The exact way he would be treated	Isaiah 53
7. Exact nature of his death	Zech 12 Isaiah 53
8. Redemption, the effect of his death	Isaiah 53 Isaiah 49
9. Resurrection	Psalm 16
10. Ascension until return	Psalm 110

Is the Bible inspired? Have the predictions of the ancient seers come to pass? Here is one example of their authoritative claims. *'... I am God and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.'*⁹ The following is an example of fulfilled prophecy.

⁶Matthew 21.42 ⁷Matthew 22.29 ⁸Luke 18.31 ⁹Isaiah 46.9,10

PROPHETIC ACCURACY

Prophecy concerning Israel and the Jews is a particularly convincing piece of evidence on which to have faith in the Bible.

Q. Why have the Jews survived their terrible history?

A. Because the Bible said they would.¹⁰

Q. Why have they been established in Israel over the last 45 years as a nation?

A. Because God said they would be regathered.¹¹

Q. Why have they been regathered?

A. As a sign to all nations of the approaching intervention by God in the affairs of man.¹²

Just as surely as these prophecies have come to pass, so will the future prophecies concerning the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth come true, and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.

ONE GOD

The Bible declares its author to be a unity. The previous issue of this magazine (see page 14) included details of how the doctrine of the Trinity gradually developed in the church, owing much to the influence of Greek philosophy, not to Biblical doctrine. Readers may be surprised to learn that the concept of three Gods in one and one in three, co-equal and co-eternal is nowhere taught in Scripture. The formula 'God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit', a cornerstone doctrine of the vast majority of 'Christian' churches, is NOT spoken of in Scripture. For instance, 'the Lord Jesus Christ is His created son, born of Mary, and, though now exalted to his Father's side in heaven, is still subject to his Father's will'.¹⁶

But let the Bible speak for itself.

'For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men.'¹³

'One God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all.¹⁴
Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one'¹⁵

The Holy Spirit is the essential power or energy of Almighty God and not a separate entity. It was this power through which his son was conceived. The angel Gabriel said to Mary, '*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*'¹⁷

It is entirely unnecessary to add human ideas and philosophical formulae to the simple teaching of the Word of God. Theologians admit that the doctrine of the Trinity is one which is a profound mystery and cannot be comprehended. How odd, when the simple teaching of the original Word *can* be clearly understood!

¹⁰Jeremiah 30.11 ¹¹Ezekiel 36 & 37 ¹²Ezekiel 38 ¹³1 Timothy 2.5 (NIV) ¹⁴Ephesians 4.6

¹⁵Deuteronomy 6.4 (NIV) ¹⁶1 Corinthians 15.28 ¹⁷Luke 1.35

FAITH

'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.'¹⁸ But what is faith? The Bible tells us . . . 'Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.'¹⁹ If we could perform some great public miracle to prove God's existence, or the authority of His Word, then there would not be any room left for faith. And it is faith, above all things, which is necessary to please God.

'And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek Him.'²⁰

That depends on the reaction of the individual. It is very clear from Scripture that the reward offered is that of eternal life on earth to be given to *some* after the Lord Jesus has returned. It is our sincere hope that this magazine will help you to a proper understanding of the Gospel message in the Word of the One God.

These are the words of the Apostle Peter:

'Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ . . . whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.'²¹

Justin Giles
Lee

¹⁸Romans 10.17 ¹⁹Hebrews 11.1 (NIV) ²⁰Hebrews 11.6 (NIV) ²¹Acts 3.19-21

Incline Thine Ear Unto Wisdom

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction'¹

THE WISE MAN

SOLOMON THE SON of David was one of the wisest men who ever lived. The second son of King David and Bathsheba, he built, on the foundation laid by his father, not only the great temple in Jerusalem but a kingdom that stretched the length of the holy land and increased in power and wealth until it was famous worldwide. This zenith of the nation of Israel in trade, influence and example of prudent rulership, was the closest Israel has ever been to the Kingdom of God which is yet to be established when Christ returns. In fact, a close study of the way in which David prepared for the building of the temple and Solomon completed it, will reveal that it is a type of the first and second coming of Christ. Jesus himself was the foundation stone of the temple of believers and it is still under construction until Jesus returns to complete the work.

So we see that the events in Solomon's reign have far reaching importance in telling us about God's purpose. How did Solomon manage to be so successful? From the very beginning God promised David a son who would build the temple and on whom God would look favourably.

'And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee . . . and I will stablish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.'²

This, of course, refers to both Solomon and Christ. Later, when Solomon was crowned, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and asked him what he desired. Solomon's answer was full of humility and wonder at his position of privilege and he asked:

'Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad.'³

This so pleased God that He also promised him riches and honour and a long life if he kept God's statutes like David his father.

¹Proverbs 1.7 ²II Samuel 7.12,13 ³I Kings 3.9

So that is where the success and wisdom of Solomon came from. No wonder Israel rose to such wealth and power during his reign. Solomon himself studied all manner of subjects including science, music, botany and biology to name just a few. Examples of his judgments and fame are listed in 1 Kings chapters 3, 4 and 5.

THE PROVERBS

It is a blessing to us that much of the wisdom he was given by God was written down. In 1 Kings 4.32 we are told he spoke 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs. Much of this is available to us in the books of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon and a few of the most interesting proverbs will be (God willing) the subject of future articles.

You may think that the sayings of a man who lived 3,000 years ago could hardly be relevant to us today. Who did he write them for? Solomon undoubtedly gained much of his early understanding of God from his father and mother. The first nine chapters of Proverbs are addressed to his own son — probably Rehoboam who reigned after him. If this is so, it is a sad fact that his son did not learn enough from his father and his behaviour destroyed much of that achieved during his father's 40-year reign.

There is a very important lesson to be learnt from these events. David was a man 'after God's own heart'. He sinned greatly in his life, committing murder and adultery, but he repented of his sin and was forgiven by God. Solomon, after an incredibly auspicious start, sadly erred in multiplying unto himself over 12,000 horses and 1,000 wives. These are the problems with kings which were listed by Samuel when Israel first asked for a king.⁴ How true it was, and how sad that Solomon with all his knowledge could not control his own actions. Rarely, in scripture, do we find examples of faithful men who also had faithful sons. Perhaps the rebellious nature of mankind is the cause of such events. So even with a father like David, Solomon had troubles in life.

'... he [Solomon] had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart.'⁵

When we read Solomon's Proverbs and especially the Ecclesiastes, one gets the impression that perhaps in the later years of his life Solomon turned back to God. However, his son Rehoboam certainly did not follow his father's wisdom.

In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul says:

'... faith [cometh] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.'⁶

which indicates that although it is essential to receive the Word of God, one also has to 'hear' it, or take it into one's mind. Solomon wrote his wisdom down for his posterity and for ourselves, but we have to read, understand and act upon it for it to do us any good.

⁴1 Samuel 8.10-18 ⁵1 Kings 11.3 ⁶Romans 10.17

INCLINE THINE EAR

So Solomon says in the second chapter of Proverbs:

'My son, . . . incline thine ear unto wisdom, [and] apply thine heart to understanding; . . . Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.'⁷

Perhaps Rehoboam did not read his father's words. Perhaps he read them but did not apply his heart to them. It is no good reading even the word of God unless we take those words into our hearts and into our lives. As James said:

'For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth (therein), he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.'⁸

THE FIRST STEP

The proverb used in our title emphasises this idea but adds one more feature:

The first thing one has to learn from God's word is 'The fear of the Lord'. This is an understanding that God is the Creator of all things. He is the supreme being, the Almighty. His ways are so far above ours that we will never be able to approach Him except in the way He appoints. Our God is a consuming fire that dwells in light unapproachable by mortal man. A realisation of this fact will instil in us an awe and reverence for what God says. We will recognise our own position as mere creatures of His hand, made from dust and destined to death, except for the working of God's boundless love and grace. That is the beginning. Unfortunately in this world of humanistic values, it is a rare attitude. Humility has been replaced by the cult of individuality. The world is doing it 'my way' not 'God's way'.

Having made the first step then, one has to read God's word and gain from it the knowledge of God's purpose. This is a privilege that God has seen fit to share with His creation. But as the proverb says, having found this knowledge, only a fool will not have the wisdom to act upon it and be obedient unto the Word of God for in this activity of submission or of surrendering our freewill to the will of God, we are giving God glory.

The final step is 'instruction'. This implies correction or a continual learning process through reproof and guidance. To follow this stage, it is obviously important to read and re-read God's word which is able to make us '*wise unto salvation*'.⁹

⁷Proverbs 2.1-5 ⁸James 1.23-25 ⁹II Timothy 3.15

THE OUTCOME

So having read the words of the wise man and followed his instruction, where will it lead us? We will learn about God. We will understand the purpose of the creation. We will learn what to do to live lives in accordance with the will of God. We will find out how to overcome the limitations of our mortality and how to obtain forgiveness for falling so far short of God's standards. But most of all, we will obtain the gift from God of eternal life.

'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.'¹⁰

'I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.'¹¹

R Griffiths
Bexley

"Train up a child" *The Cover photograph*

Children have enquiring minds! "Mummy, why . . . ?" so often precedes yet another difficult question to be answered by mum. Sometimes, the questions can be very difficult to answer and yet, because they are very real enquiries about the world we live in, we just have to do our best to satisfy young minds. In this issue of *Light* we begin a new series under the theme "***Incline thine ear unto wisdom***". In these articles we shall be looking at divine wisdom in the inspired writings of Solomon. He presents much of this wisdom in the teaching and advice of a wise father and whether we are young or old, here is wisdom for us all, for it is God's wisdom. Christ also commends a child-like attitude:

'Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.'¹

¹Matthew 18.3

¹⁰John 17.3 ¹¹1 Corinthians 10.15

1st Epistle of John

THIS LETTER CONTAINS a series of exhortations squarely based on John's gospel and is generally recognised as being from the same writer. Its vocabulary and its allusions to the gospel are manifold. What is more difficult is to follow the apostle's thought processes from one proposition to the next. In fact this is nothing new, for several Old Testament portions exhibit similar series of statements, apparently unconnected. See, for example, Jeremiah 10, Hosea 8-10, and much of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. Only careful and repeated reading of this epistle will reveal the wealth of doctrine and symbolism it contains. I hope this synopsis will provide a few pointers to this treasury of the thoughts and aims of the disciple whom Jesus loved, viz. John son of Zebedee, guided as they were by the Spirit of God.

STRUCTURE OF THE LETTER

R G Moulton's subheadings, dividing the letter into 14 sections (plus a prologue and an epilogue), form a convenient basis for exposition. Here they are, with only slight modification to the wording:

1.1-4 PROLOGUE

1.5-2.28 THEME 1: GOD IS LIGHT

i	God is light	1.5-7
ii	Cleansing from sin	1.8-2.2
iii	The commands our surety	2.3-6
iv	The old command and the new	2.7-11
v	The three ages	2.12-14
vi	Love of the world	2.15-17
vii	Antichrist	2.18-28
i	Sons of God	2.29-3.12
ii	Love of the brethren	3.13-23
iii	The Spirit our surety	3.24-4.6
iv	Love	4.7-21
v	Faith	5.1-5
vi	Three who bear witness	5.6-13
vii	Boldness in asking	5.14-17

2.29-5.17 THEME 2: BEGOTTEN OF GOD

5.18-21 EPILOGUE

The prologue is fascinating, reflecting as it does the wonderment and awe of the disciples at the renewed presence of Jesus in person after his crucifixion and resurrection. Read in the light of John 20.19-29, it underlines their joy in finding their dear Teacher alive and well, yet with an indubitably material body — visible, audible and palpable. Unlike the blind eyes and deaf ears of their fellow-

¹John 12.39,40

countrymen,¹ the Eleven saw, heard, handled — and believed! Jesus was alive again, no longer subject to death and decay. Eternal life, which hitherto had been possessed only by his Father and the angels,² was now realised and exemplified in him, and also *prospectively* in all true believers; all this had been made possible by his own sacrifice. No wonder Jesus is styled *'that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.'*³ Paul wrote similar words: *'When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.'*⁴ John then declares his major role as that of bearing witness to these vital facts, that others might in this life have fellowship with the apostles, the Son and the Father, and have eternal life in the age to come.

The body of this letter divides into two main themes, as the table shows. Here are brief notes on the seven sections in each theme:

THEME 1: GOD IS LIGHT (1.5-2.28)

God is light (1.5-7) Our Creator dwells in unapproachable light,⁵ but in this letter the apostle is referring not to physical but to spiritual light, viz. the truth of God in its moral aspects and obligations. The Christian's prime duty is to *'walk'* in that light,⁶ ie live a life consistent with God's truth, essentially by loving Him and His children and obeying His commandments. Only by so doing can he be cleansed from all his sins by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus.⁷

Cleansing from sin (1.8-2.2) Some self-deceived persons claim to be sinless (in spite of the dictum: *'all have sinned'*).⁸ Confession of sin is essential, and if done in humility and sincerity it will receive forgiveness, ie cleansing from all unrighteousness. Jesus is the believer's Advocate, interceding with the Father on his behalf. He is also the *'propitiation'* or covering for sin, a concept rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures where sacrifice provided that covering (like the garments of skin by which God clothed our first parents).⁹

The commandments our surety (2.3-6) The Christian's great duty and privilege is to *'know God'* through His Son — not as mere head knowledge but by keeping His commands. (Note in this connection the divine testimony to king Josiah of Judah: *'He judged the cause of the poor and needy . . . ; was not this to know me? saith the Lord'*).¹⁰ No claim to know God or Christ will be accepted from those disobedient to God's laws. We can measure our own standing with God by judging ourselves according to these criteria.

The old commandment and the new (2.7-11) *'The old commandment'*, restated by Moses but doubtless in existence from Eden, was that a man should love God with all his being, and love his neighbour as himself.¹¹ How does this differ from the new commandment? It does not, except in the very important respect that Jesus, *'the*

²1 Timothy 1.17; 6.16; Luke 20.36 ³1 John 1.2 ⁴Colossians 3.4 ⁵1 Timothy 6.16

⁶cp John 12.35,36; Ephesians 5.8 ⁷1 Peter 1.2 ⁸Romans 3.23 ⁹Genesis 3.21; cp Psalm 32.1

¹⁰Jeremiah 22.16 ¹¹Deuteronomy 6.4,5; Leviticus 19.18

true light', has now set us the perfect **example** of complete obedience and love.¹² Note in verses 9-11 how walking in light or darkness is a figure for loving or hating one's brother.

The three ages (2.12-14) (Three according to Moulton, but should it not rather be two?) Christian assemblies are best constituted with a mix of old and young. The 'fathers' here are the elders — like John himself; the rest of the brothers are the 'young men', keen and active but without the elders' long experience. It seems likely that the phrase '*little children*'¹³ is the equivalent of '*beloved*',¹⁴ ie John is addressing all his readers with this affectionate diminutive, the equivalent of '*my sons*' in the Old Testament.¹⁵ The repetition here may well be explained by John's change of tense, first: '*I am writing to you . . .*' (RSV) ie in this letter, and then: '*I have written to you . . .*' (RV), ie in my gospel (which you have already received).

Love of the world (2.15-17) In John's writings '*the world*' stands for all that is ungodly¹⁶ — men and women unenlightened by God's truth. It is often used with special reference to the unbelieving Jewish world. The three items cited, the lust of the flesh and eyes and the pride (RV '*vainglory*') of life hark back to the original temptation of Eve in Eden. But the world itself, with its lusts, will disappear; only those obedient to God will remain.

Antichrist (2.18-28) The Antichrist is traditionally understood to be the one great adversary of Jesus. The prefix 'anti' is taken as meaning 'against'. So it does in Latin, but in Greek 'anti' signifies a substitute or rival, having here the sense of a false claimant to the title 'Christ'. Nor is the term Scripturally restricted to one man, for John speaks of '*many antichrists*',¹⁷ who separated themselves from the company and fellowship of the apostles. Such persons were liars, because they denied that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, and in denying the Son they also denied the Father who sent him (verse 22). How could believers keep themselves separate from these people? The apostle states that those in fellowship with him had an '*anointing*' (AV '*unction*') by which they would know all things (verse 20). He is referring to the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, promised by Jesus to the disciples and poured out on the day of Pentecost.¹⁸ By the Holy Spirit they would be taught all things, and all things would be brought to their remembrance.¹⁹ The Greek word for '*anointing*' is '*chrisma*'; it is related to 'Christos, the anointed one and, of course, to 'antichristos'. So John, in a play on words, is exhorting his readers to allow the guidance of this 'chrisma' to nullify the evil influence of the antichristos. When the Holy Spirit was withdrawn²⁰ there remained with the believers the Spirit-inspired Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, as their infallible guide and yardstick, to guard them from being led astray.²¹

¹²John 13.34 ¹³cp verses 18 and 28; 4.4 and John 13.33 ¹⁴I John 3.2; 4.1,7

¹⁵eg Proverbs 4.1; 8.32 RV and more frequently in the singular 'my son' ¹⁶I John 5.18

¹⁷I John 2.18; II John 7 ¹⁸Acts 2 ¹⁹verse 27; John 14.26 ²⁰I Corinthians 13.6-8 ²¹verse 26 RV

THEME 2: BEGOTTEN OF GOD (2.29-5.17)

The title of this second theme reflects the wording of chapter 5 verse 1, and in the RV '*begotten*' replaces '*born*' in all seven occurrences in this section. Again John's gospel is the source.²² '*Begotten*' stresses God's role as a loving **Father**, and this half of the epistle has much to say about His love for His children and how they should react to it, loving not only Him but also His dear Son and all His children. Note that this sonship by adoption **excludes** '*the world*' of unbelievers;²³ it is only achieved by belief (ie faith) and baptism ('burial in water') into the name of Jesus.²⁴

Sons of God (2.29-3.12) By baptism, believers become God's children now, in this present life of probation. What they will attain to is not yet revealed,²⁵ but **whenever** Christ appears (so it should read; the uncertainty is not about the **fact** of his return but the actual timing) we shall be like him, with our bodies transformed to be like his glorious body.²⁶

The examples of Cain and Abel²⁷ show the vast difference between the (obedient) '*seed of the woman*' and the (disobedient) '*seed of the serpent*' (each, after the analogy of natural seed, bearing fruit after its kind).²⁸ The point is that only those who **regularly** practise righteousness will be counted as righteous. The rest commit sin persistently, like their spiritual father, and will ultimately be destroyed at Christ's return.²⁹

Love of the brethren (3.13-23) The world is characterised by its **hate** — especially towards those who bear witness to its wickedness,³⁰ and hatred leads to murder. But God's children must **love** one another. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends (as Jesus did).³¹ This is the ultimate sacrifice and, perhaps fortunately, the occasion to do so is rarely met today. Much more immediate is the duty and privilege to share our material blessings with those who lack them.³² James makes the same point in his letter³³ as does Paul in I Timothy 6.17-19. So we must practise what we preach!³⁴ If we do, God will grant our requests — subject to His will.³⁵

The Spirit our surety (3.24-4.6) Having '*put on*' Christ in baptism, the believer must '*abide in him*' by keeping his commandments. In John's day the elders, guided by the Holy Spirit, were able to distinguish truth from error in doctrinal matters, but then (as now) many false prophets were threatening the '*unity of the Spirit*' by teaching false doctrine.³⁶ An acid test then (and still valid today) was whether these men taught that Jesus had come in mortal, sinful flesh (*Hebrews* 2.14 — although he himself was sinless throughout his life on earth). The deceitful spirit of the antichrist

²²John 1.12-14 (RVm) ²³John 17.9 ²⁴Romans 6.3,4; Galatians 3.26-29 ²⁵I John 3.2; so Romans 8.18-21 ²⁶I John 3.2; Philippians 3.20,21 ²⁷I John 3.12 ²⁸Genesis 1.11

²⁹I John 3.8; II Thessalonians 1.7-9 ³⁰John 15.18,19; 17.14 ³¹I John 3.16 cp John 15.13

³²I John 3.17 ³³James 2.14-16 ³⁴I John 3.18,19 ³⁵verses 22 and I John 5.16,17

³⁶cp Matthew 7.15; 24.11

was already at work, denying this basic truth.³⁷ By this test the spirit of truth could be distinguished from the spirit of error,³⁸ and those rejecting the apostles' teaching were '*not of God*'. Today it is the Spirit Word which is our guide and guardian, from which we can make sure that our understanding conforms to the divine testimony.

Love (4.7-21) The basis of this section is the well-known passage in *John* 3.16: 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

The word '*so*' is not one of emphasis but means 'God loved the world *like this* — He gave his only-begotten Son . . .' similarly in verse 11 here. The apostle is at pains to stress that it was God who first loved us.³⁹ We must follow the divine example, loving Him and His children, and aiming for that perfect love which will give boldness, ie confidence in His mercy, in the day of judgment.⁴⁰

Faith (5.1-5) Like the previous section, this one also begins with the thought of begetting, this time stating that whoever believes ('*has faith*') that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God, and such a one gets victory over the world and its unbelief.⁴¹ But faith must be accompanied by love, ie a loving obedience to God's commandments.⁴² These commandments are not 'grievous', ie 'burdensome' — a contrast with the heavy burdens imposed by the scribes and Pharisees.⁴³ By this same faith Jesus himself gained his victory over the world.⁴⁴

Three who bear witness (5.6-13) These three are named in verse 8; they exclude those listed in the AV of verse 7, which is universally acknowledged as being a spurious passage inserted as late as the sixteenth century. Jesus came '*by water*', ie his Messiahship was proclaimed at his baptism.⁴⁵ In his sacrifice at Calvary there was an effusion of **blood** and **water**⁴⁶ when, in order to fulfil Zechariah 12.10, his side was pierced. Lastly, according to his own promise,⁴⁷ the Holy **Spirit**, the Comforter, was sent and filled the Twelve at Pentecost, enabling them to proclaim with power and conviction that the one whom the Jews had crucified was indeed both Lord and Christ.⁴⁸

At first glance, verses 11-13 appear to lend support to the evangelical claim that believers have eternal life already, but this claim contradicts the broad testimony of Scripture that the gift of immortality is bestowed **after** resurrection and judgment; it is illogical to argue for reward first, and **then** judgment! The assurance here is a **promise**, and is expressly said to be such in I John 2.25. As distinct from something

³⁷I John 4.2,3 ³⁸I John 4.6 ³⁹verses 10 and 19; cp Romans 5.8 ⁴⁰verse 40 ⁴¹I John 5.1,5

⁴²see I Corinthians 13.2 ⁴³Matthew 23.4 ⁴⁴John 16.33; Revelation 5.5

⁴⁵Matthew 3.17; John 1.33,34 ⁴⁶John 19.34,35 ⁴⁷John 14.15-18 ⁴⁸Acts 2.36

possessed now, eternal life is **hoped for**⁴⁹ — but we do not hope for something we already have.⁵⁰ The fulfilment awaits the return of Jesus,⁵¹ who brings his reward with him.⁵² But as God always keeps His Word, the promise here means it is as good as done.

Boldness in asking (5.14-17) To appreciate the meaning here we again have to take the context into consideration. John and his fellow apostles, who possessed the Spirit, could seek for direct guidance to know God's will and to make petition accordingly. John's statement does not give us licence today to expect an affirmative answer to every request of ours, but the more we are in tune with the divine mind the more we shall ask in accordance with God's will. Even in the apostle's day there were exceptions, such as the case of one committing a mortal sin.⁵³ As it happened, James and John had earlier requested a favour from Jesus, which the Master declared himself unauthorised to grant.⁵⁴

The epilogue (5.18-21) This may be regarded as a summary of all the foregoing, and consists of three statements, each beginning '*We know . . .*'⁵⁵ As previously pointed out, the '*sinneth not*' in verse 18 (apart from the sinless Jesus) must mean 'does not continue or persist in sin' but, each son begotten by God keeps himself from sinning. Verse 19 makes a stark division: either we are in fellowship with the Father and Son, or we are '*of the world*'; no compromise is possible. Verse 20 reaffirms that God has been revealed by the (first) coming of His Son, that men should both know Him (ie God himself) and be '*in him*', by being '*in the Son*'. The true God, so revealed, has guaranteed eternal life to all who overcome the world (see the promises to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3). The apostle concludes with an urgent plea that his '*little children*' should shun '*idols*', ie any substitute for the true God — a clear reference back to the first commandment at Sinai.⁵⁶ In the ancient world there was always the danger of literal idolatry; nowadays covetousness⁵⁷ and hero worship are rampant and just as obnoxious to the Holy One who dwells in heaven.

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⁴⁹Titus 1.2 ⁵⁰Romans 8.24,25 ⁵¹Colossians 3.3,4 ⁵²Revelation 22.12 ⁵³1 John 5.16 — such as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit — Matthew 12.31,32 ⁵⁴Mark 10.35-40 ⁵⁵1 John 5.18,19 and 20 ⁵⁶Exodus 20.3-5 ⁵⁷Ephesians 5.5